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China Regime In Turmoil as Nixon Visits

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A seething Chinese political situation will lie in the carefully concealed background of Richard M. Nixon's return trip to Peking, with the host of his first visit now a posthumous target of a new Maoist campaign against "capitalist roaders" accused of subverting communism.

Former President Nixon was scheduled to fly from California today for a three- or four-day visit to Peking. Although he probably will be carefully shielded from the political struggle there, his presence could shed some light on how the fight is going.

His 1972 host, Premier Chou En-lai, died Jan. 8. Now that Chou's influence can no longer be used to fend off the kind of radical leftist attacks that have been made for three years on pragmatic bureaucrats, the new campaign is swelling into another wave of the Cultural Revolution.

THE FRUSTRATED anger of radicals grouped around the Chinese Communist party chairman, Mao Tse-tung, over their inability to budge Chou in recent years is coming out in a dramatic rush.

Their immediate targets are the man Chou chose as his successor, Teng Hsiao-ping, and top administrators put into key positions by the two men. But the implication of the wall posters and People's Daily articles of the past two weeks is that Chou had been the obstacle to overcoming what Mao felt was a corruption of his true Communist principles.

There are even suggestions of a personal vindictiveness toward the late premier, who died after a four-year struggle with cancer. Some Chinese administrators felt unhappily that Chou's funeral was deliberately kept low-keyed in order to avoid too much popular outpouring of affection for the man who had built up and run Communist China since 1949.

THE CURRENT campaign has broad implications concerning the methods of governing China in the future and the men who will be in control. Economic policy is the focus of dispute between those who support Mao's ideological approach and bureaucrats who see the need for material incentives as a supplement to Communist exhortation.

The implications for China's foreign policy are less clear.

There has been no sign of a significant softening of hostility between Peking and Moscow, despite the recent release by China of three Soviet helicopter crewmen who had been held since they crossed the border almost two years earlier.

China, however, is assumed by many foreign observers to want to improve relations with the Soviet Union at least enough to establish a balance between it and the United States in foreign relations. Some of the Maoist radicals have been critical of the opening toward Washington since 1971, although Mao himself has been bitterly anti-Soviet.

NIXON'S VISIT will serve to reaffirm the 1971 decision, carefully attributed to Mao but strongly influenced by Chou, to give the United States a chance to end its long effort to ignore and isolate the world's most populous nation. Because Nixon seized that chance, the Chinese have respected him as a major American historic figure — regardless of any other troubles he might have had.

Peking thought Nixon was moving toward the full

normalization of relations, which meant breaking U.S. commitments to the Chinese Nationalist regime on Taiwan, when Watergate intervened. President Ford has shown no signs of making progress toward that Chinese goal.

The designation of Hua Kuo-feng, an agricultural administrator and for the past year the head of internal security, as acting premier of China was officially disclosed the day after the Nixon trip was announced Feb. 6. But any connection is unlikely.

Communist officials inside China and in Hong Kong had been informed a week or more earlier of Hua's selection. Some versions said he was personally chosen by Mao, from whose home district Hua rose rapidly to national prominence. It was only when a Hong Kong newspaper published the news that Peking confirmed it with its identification of Hua as acting premier in an official meeting.

TO THE EXTENT that he appears to be Mao's man, Hua might be presumed to lack any bias in favor of the Soviet Union, and perhaps to harbor an antipathy toward it. But he seems to be a fairly neutral, compromise figure uninvolved in foreign relations.

If he meets Nixon, as seems possible or even likely, then the United States might get its first personal reading on the man. The former head of the U.S. liaison office in Peking and now director of the CIA, George Bush, said yesterday he did not know the man and was surprised at his appointment.

But whether Nixon would relay anything he learns of Hua or the Chinese political situation to U.S. officials was uncertain.

Ford, nettled by possible awkward implications of the Nixon trip, has made a point of ordering no special government briefings for the former president. And Bush said the CIA would make no attempt to interview him on his return.

And by the nature of Chinese politics, Nixon is not likely to learn much. The Chinese do not discuss their internal differences with foreigners before they are ready to explain them at home. So far they have not done so.